

**All Creatures Care Cottage
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Client information handout

Iguana

Introduction

Iguanas range from Mexico through most of South America. Most iguanas sold as pets are farm raised in Central America. They hatch at 6 inches and can reach 6 feet in length. Iguanas can live up to 20 years.

Behavior

If regularly handled, iguanas will become very tame. However, adult males can become aggressive during their breeding season. Iguanas can be housebroken and left out of their cage as long as a warm basking area is provided. Iguanas spend most of their day basking in sunlight on tree branches. They are excellent climbers and swimmers. They enjoy a swim in the bathtub or “kiddy” pool, but should be supervised at all times during their swim.

Housing

Housing should replicate a warm humid climate. A plexi-glass aquarium is the best type of aquarium because some ultraviolet light can transmit through. Ultraviolet light will not transfer through glass. Iguanas require sunlight to digest food properly and to metabolize calcium. Your pet iguana should be able to turn around in their caging or it is too small. The temperature should be 95 to 100 degrees Fahrenheit on the basking side of the enclosure, with an overall ambient temperature of 80 degrees Fahrenheit or more. Provide perching branches so they can climb, and also to get closer to heat on basking side of cage as needed. The cage should cool down 10 degrees Fahrenheit at night.

Provide a large water bowl, as iguanas like to soak. It is important to provide a UV light which helps utilize calcium in their diet. Never place an iguana outside in the sun in a glass tank. Wire cages with shade from the sun are good basking cages. Avoid using wood or bark as flooring, because bacteria builds up quickly and cannot be properly cleaned. Also, iguanas will occasionally eat their substrate and cause blockage problems. Astro-turf can be used as a safe substrate. Also, iguanas should be housed alone.

Diet

A healthy diet consists of dark leafy greens, which include collard, mustard and turnip greens, escarole, and chicory greens make up at least 60% of their daily diet, and vegetables make up 30 % of the diet. Choose vegetables such as yellow squash, zucchini, sweet potato, pumpkin, and green beans (finely chopped). The remaining 10% of the diet are fruit like mango, papaya, raspberries, and cactus fruit. Fruits are low in calcium, so only feed them once or twice a week as a treat. A calcium powder supplement should be used 2 to 3 times per week. A multi-vitamin powder should be used at least once a week. Never feed iceberg lettuce, as it has no nutritional values.

Common medical problems

Pick up your iguana on a regular basis and closely look at it. Feel for any lumps or sores. Look for skin color changes, and changes in size of the jaw, legs, toes, or tail. Lumps anywhere on the body are usually abscesses. Egg binding is a serious problem, and requires immediate attention by an experienced iguana veterinarian. Pregnant females stop eating, become listless and depressed. Beware of a condition called dry gangrene where the tip of the tail starts to turn brown from necrosis (lack of blood supply). Iguanas may also rub their noses on their cage causing rostral abrasions.

Metabolic bone disease can be prevented with proper diet. Symptoms of metabolic bone disease can include swelling of legs or base of tail, inability to lift or hold their heads up, eating less, and sleeping more. See your exotic veterinarian immediately when any signs are noticed. This will ensure a long and healthy relationship between you and your iguana.